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ABSTRACT

Small-group instruction is designed to develop group and individual interaction of all students. This learning module presents three groups of activities which should maximize small-group effectiveness. These activities are categorized according to functions best suited for small-group instruction, organization of the small group, and pointers for effective small-group instruction. A module pre- and post-test are presented in addition to self-tests for each activity grouping. (MJM)

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Small Group Instruction

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August, 1971

MAJOR CONCEPTS AND RATIONALE

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This fall our students are scheduled into large groups, small groups, laboratory classes and independent study time. Although many teachers feel that large group instruction is the more formidable, teachers who have taught in flexibly scheduled schools have found that small groups tap more teacher talent than any of the other instructional techniques.

Keokuk Junior High School's Evaluation Report of their 1968-69 school year states that: "Both teachers and students need to develop techniques and practices in this mode of instruction. From research and experience we are now convinced that this is the most effective method of instruction presently known; however, both to teach and to learn in small groups requires a change from the teaching and learning methodology to which we have long adhered."

The main purpose of small groups is to attain group and individual interaction of <u>all</u> students, which cannot be achieved in large or conventional group situations.

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES

After you have completed the instruction you will be able to:

1. List six functions best suited for small group instruction.
2. Name four elected or appointed positions with specialized roles in the organization of a small group.
3. List five pointers for effective small group instruction.
4. Name the most important thing a teacher should <u>not</u> do in small group instruction.

PRETEST
"Small Group Instruction"*

1. Name six functions best suited for small group instruction.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

(6) _____

*Answers to Pretest on following page

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2. What four specialized positions should be appointed or elected when the small group is organized.

(1)_____

(2)_____

(3)_____

(4)_____

3. Describe what a teacher should not do during small group instruction.

_____

_____

Answers to Pretest "Small Group Instruction"

1. (1) Students learn to discuss a topic and communicate effectively.
   (2) Small group discussion uses and reinforces knowledge gained from other instructional techniques.
   (3) Students learn to crystallize ideas and attitudes.
   (4) Small groups provide opportunity for students to ask questions and gain assistance.
   (5) Group leadership may be developed.
   (6) The teacher may evaluate students and instruction. This evaluation provides for future planning.

2. (1) Leader or Facilitator
   (2) Recorder
   (3) Observer
   (4) Consultant

3. (1) Topics should be ones in which the students are interested and familiar.
   (2) The teacher should rarely serve as chairman.
   (3) The teacher should serve as observer and counselor.
   (4) The group should be in the form of a circle.
   (5) Involve all the students.

4. The teacher must not dominate the small group situation. The teacher's role is a passive one.

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LESSON I: FUNCTIONS BEST SUITED FOR SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION

1. Small group discussions provide essential education for citizenship in a democracy. Pupils learn to discuss controversial matters, to communicate effectively, to listen to and respect the opinions of others, and to deal with people whose backgrounds and interests differ from their own.

2. Small group discussion uses and reinforces some of the knowledge pupils gain from large groups and in independent study.

3. Small group discussion helps students to crystallize ideas and attitudes formed in other learning activities.

4. Small group setting provides an opportunity for students to ask questions and seek assistance in work assigned in large group meetings.

5. The small group setting allows students equal opportunities for group leadership.

6. The small group discussion provides the teacher the opportunity to analyze the student's reactions to course content and to assess their knowledge of it. He can also observe the ability of each individual. From the small group, the teacher will obtain insights that should lead to improved large group presentations and to more effective independent study.

SELF-TEST - SMALL GROUP FUNCTIONS

The major function of small groups is to:_____

_____

(Provide for the opportunity for students to attain group and individual interaction.)

LESSON II: ORGANIZATION OF THE SMALL GROUP

Four people with specialized roles facilitate small group discussion. A "leader" helps to guide the discussion. A "recorder" keeps an account of what the group discusses. An "observer" constructively criticizes the discussion. A "consultant" provides information that the group needs.

The Leader or Facilitator

The group leader may be elected by the group or appointed by the teacher. The leader should maintain order by encouraging one person to speak at a time, involve as many persons as possible in the discus-

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sion, allow minority opinions to be heard, and keep the discussion within the bounds of the topic and time available. An effective leader does not offer opinions or give answers, but encourages the group to develop their own thoughts. Some teachers find it beneficial in the beginning, to provide student leaders with a set of questions to help them to begin the discussion.

The Recorder

One member of the group is appointed "recorder." He keeps a record of the discussion and reports back to the group on request. Since the group is more interested in what is said rather than who said it, it is not necessary for the recorder to record names of persons making contributions.

The Observer

One student serves as a group "observer." The "observer" doesn't participate in the discussion so that he can concentrate on what is happening. Following a group discussion, he reports whether some persons are monopolizing the group time or if some are not contributing to the group. The "observer" helps to summarize the discussion and makes suggestions on the group's procedures and techniques.

The Consultant

The teacher, an invited expert, or sometimes a student, may serve as a "consultant." The "consultant" provides information and experience that other members may not have, but he should not make a speech or monopolize the discussion. Many teachers find this role difficult because they set too high a level for discussion or allow themselves to dominate the group because of the status of his position. (I'll try to keep this in mind at our faculty meetings this year.)

SELF-TEST - SMALL GROUP ORGANIZATION

A small group may have four people with specialized roles. They are --

1._____ 2._____

3._____ 4._____

(Answers: Leader, Recorder, Observer and Consultant)

Quest: Read chapter 20 of Secondary School Curriculum Improvement by Trump & Miller. View the film Small Group Instruction by Dr. Dwight Allen. Read chapter 5 "Small Group Instruction" in An Educator's Guide to the New Design by Manatt & Meeks. Read Glatthorn's work on small group instruction. (Send to Allan A. Glatthorn, Principal Abington High School, North Campus, Abington, Pennsylvania 19001.) Read Small Groups: Some Sociological Perspectives by Clovis R. Shepheard.

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LESSON III: POINTERS FOR EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. There are at least two criteria which a small group discussion topic should meet: (1) the students must be familiar with the topic, and (2) it must be one about which the students are interested.

2. The teacher should rarely serve as the chairman of the group. The role of teacher should be that of consultant and advisor. In this role he helps to clarify issues and if necessary correct erroneous information.

3. In time, the teacher should find himself more of an observer and counselor. His job being to provide educational problems and learning experiences --not to be an active participant in the discussion. If after a few meetings, you find the discussion so lively that you find it difficult to refrain from participating, you have arrived.

4. Form the group in a circle. This provides each member with equal status in the group.

5. Involve all the students in the discussion. Every human being has a certain degree of self-centeredness. Boys and girls are usually more interested in their own achievements in the group than just listening to others.

6. Realize that it will take time for children to learn to discuss. After years of traditional classroom instruction, students tend to sit back and wait for the teacher to talk.

SELF-TEST - POINTERS FOR EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The main thing the teacher and principal must guard against in working with students and teachers in small groups is _____

_____

_____

Answer: The teacher and principal must learn not to dominate the situation. Many teachers and principals find it difficult to "shut up" long enough, or to step down from the dominant role, in order for small group work to be effective.

POST - TEST
"Small Group Instruction"*

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1. Functions best suited to small group instruction are:

   (1) The students' learning to discuss topics and communicate with others.

   (2) _____.

   (3) Students learn to crystallize ideas and attitudes.

   (4) _____.

   (5) Group leadership may be developed.

   (6) _____.

2. Name the four specialized small group positions described below.

   (1) Maintains order, involves as many persons as possible in the discussion, allows minority opinions, and keeps discussion in-bounds.

   _____

   (2) Keeps a record of the discussion and reports back to the group on request.

   _____.

   (3) Does not participate regularly in the discussion, but does constructively criticize the discussion.

   _____.

   (4) Provides information that the group needs.

   _____.

3. Complete the five pointers for effective small group discussion listed below.

   (1) Two criteria a small group discussion topic should meet are (a)_____ and (b)_____.

   (2) The role of the teacher should be one of _____ and _____.

*Answers to Post-test on following page

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(3) The situation you should strive for is to provide such topics and learning experiences that discussion will be so lively that _____

_____.

(4) The best configuration for a group is _____.

(5) All students have a degree of self-centeredness. We should, therefore, strive to _____

_____.

4. Most of us attended a traditional school and have taught in a conventional way. We, therefore, need to guard against _____

_____

ANSWERS TO POST-TEST

1. (2) Reinforce knowledge gained from large group instruction and independent study.

(4) Provides opportunity to ask questions and seek assistance.

(6) Provides the teacher with the opportunity to evaluate individual students and instruction.

2. (1) Leader or Facilitator

(2) Recorder

(3) Observer

(4) Consultant

3. (1) Students are familiar and interested in the topic.

(2) Consultant and advisor.

(3) You will find it difficult to stay out of the discussion.

(4) In the form of a circle.

(5) Involve all students in the discussion.

4. (a) Right! Talking too much. We need to "shut up" so that the small group work will be effective.